

Lack of Federal Protection Against the Discrimination of LGBT Persons

America is home to your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and politicians. Chances are that you know at least one person who identifies as LGBT. Someone who you love may be denied safety, shelter, work, and access to goods and services based solely on sexual orientation and/ or gender identity. There is no federal law that protects the community from discrimination. Even if you disagree with who these people are, you should know that the LGBT community's rights and dignities are denied by the very country that prides itself on equal opportunity and individual freedoms. Lawmakers and politicians are bringing their personal beliefs into laws, which is especially malignant to the welfare of the gay community. The separation of church and state is a component of our constitution that is often overlooked. We, the citizens of this country, must vote and push for change.

Arguably, the treatment of LGBT persons today has dramatically changed since the 20th century. More people are coming out, standing up, and organizing to fight for their rights. According to a 2001 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, 57% of Americans opposed same-sex marriage. In 2017, the Pew Research Center concluded that 62% percent of Americans supported same-sex marriage. The federal legalization of same-sex marriage in 2016 was a huge part of LGBT liberation in the U.S.A.; however, discrimination on a wide-scale still exists. In schools, LGBT students and teachers in forty states are not protected from discrimination. Additionally, 48% of the gay community live in states that do not prohibit employment discrimination and 72% live in states that do not prohibit credit discrimination based on sexual

orientation and/ or gender identity. LGBT mothers and fathers can also lose custody of their children based on sexuality. In Alabama, Michigan, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, the community can be denied adoption and foster care services and/ or counseling services based solely on moral obligations.

In 2015, senator Mike Pence of Indiana passed the Religious Freedom Reformation Act, which allowed businesses legal protection to discriminate, such as to deny services to LGBT couples. Although this law was revised a week later and explicitly prevented the denial of services to someone based on sexuality or gender identity, LGBT discrimination is still legal in Indiana. The current administration has also acted in the reversal of progress made during the Obama administration. In February of 2017, the Trump administration withdrew federal guidance that prohibited discrimination against transgender youth in U.S. schools. Every day, the community lives in fear that we will legally be treated as second-class citizens.

As an American, I am disappointed with the lack of progress made to ensure that the already promised freedoms extend to every American, regardless of how they identify. As a gay woman, I feel that there is still so much to fight for. Accepting who I am is a hard-enough battle that I fight every day. I fear rejection from those who love me, and I fear that this country does not care about my safety, rights, and my ability for positive growth. I am constantly hoping that the voice of my community will no longer be silenced. However, I know that my community cannot fight this battle alone. I ask not for people to change what they believe in, but rather for the basic ability to equally participate in the community in which I live. We are not asking for

special rights or treatment. We are simply fighting to prevent losing our jobs and homes because of who we are.

One of the most significant pieces of the American government is democracy. The voter turnout must increase if we want the laws of the country to reflect the entire population. Since the federal government has little influence compared to state governments when it comes to LGBT rights, residents of each state must vote to ensure our freedoms. I ask that the citizens of the United States take time to reflect on how each law and elected official will work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for all. Your participation in government will not only affect you, but also the lives and rights of the people you love.